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**TAJIKISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Farmers Gain the Freedom to Farm

**USAID-supported legal aid centers defend farmers against abuse.**



Members of Dehkan Farm “Oqoltyn” hold copies of “Freedom to Farm” brochures, published by the USAID project. Photo: NGO Shahnoza

*To promote secure land tenure rights in Tajikistan, USAID’s Land Reform and Market Development Project teaches farmers about their rights under the law and provides them with legal advice and counseling.*

Hundred and twenty-two farmers of Dehkan Farm “Oqoltyn” in Tajikistan were facing continuous interference from the local government, or *hukumat*, in their farm decisions. Despite the farmers’ protests, *hukumat* appointed two farm directors, who were withholding payment for a whole year’s crops from the members of the farm. The farmers complained to the head of the rayon, but instead of help they were hearing only the suggestions to be patient.

The farmers then turned to the USAID Land Reform and Market Development Project for help. The project’s local Legal Aid Center and the local *Tashabbuskor* (rural activist), met with the farmers to discuss their problems and set out a strategy to address them.

On behalf of the farmers, the legal aid center and *Tashabbuskor* met with the head of the rayon and introduced him to Government Resolution No. 111, which bars local governments from interfering in farm activities. The meeting went well, and the representatives left believing the local government would respect the “freedom to farm.”

However, shortly the *hukumat* appointed an outsider as a new head of the farm, despite the objections of its members. *Hukumat* officials visited the homes of Oqoltyn farm members to demand the farm’s stamp, and even took one member to jail when he refused to cooperate. The farmers protested to various *hukumat* offices, but the officials denied responsibility for the decision and claimed the order had come from the head of the rayon.

To defend the farmers, the Legal Aid Center and *Tashabbuskor* met again with the head of rayon to describe the illegal actions of his officials. Facing the evidence, the head of rayon agreed to let the farm elect its own leader.

With assistance from the USAID project, Oqoltyn Farm succeeded in defending its property from the government interference. The project continues to educate farmers and local government officials about the law to ensure the freedom to farm not only to this, but many other farms around the country.